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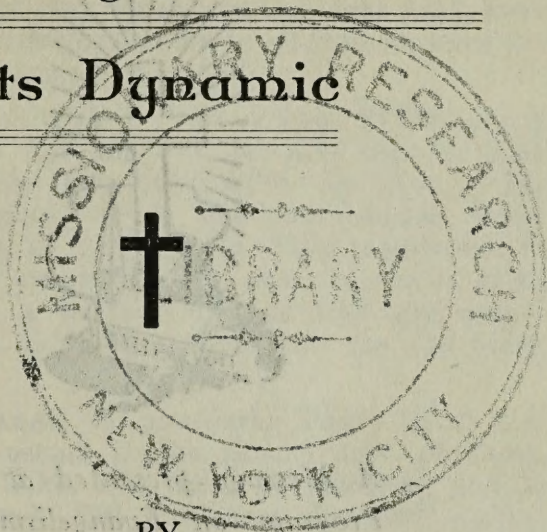
EVANGELISM TODAY. .

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Its Message, Its Motive

Its Dynamic

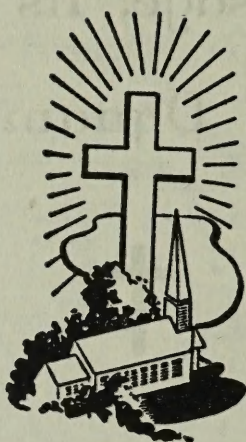


BY

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*A Message presented at the
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Buck Hill Falls, Pa. on Fri-
day, May 21, 1948.*

by

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the Moslems in Arabia, be-
loved by all in the Reformed
Church in America.*

EVANGELISM TODAY

Its Message, Its Motive, Its Dynamic

There is a new emphasis on Evangelism in all of the Protestant churches. This is encouraging but also, in a sense, alarming. A fanatic has been cleverly defined as "a man who redoubles his energies when he has forgotten his aim." When we step on the gas we must first be sure that we are on the right road, have made the right turning, and above all that we have not forgotten our basket of groceries!

When we sing at the top of our voices, "O Zion haste, thy mission high fulfilling"—do we take time to think what that mission is? And when we shout, "Fly abroad thou mighty Gospel, win and conquer, never cease" do we realize it takes more than lung-power to make it fly? To evangelize is to move heaven to earth—To evangelize is to take hold of God and man—To evangelize is to be an ambassador for the living Christ.

The word evangel is peculiarly Paul's word and Paul's life. It occurs in the Gospel only 17 times, (four times in Luke, five times in Matthew, and in Mark eight times.) But Paul uses the word eighty-seven times. It is woven into his very life and thought. Listen how Paul uses this sacred word:

"Separated unto the gospel. . . Not ashamed of the gospel. . . Fully preached the gospel. . . I have begotten you through the gospel. . . Lest we should hinder the gospel. . . Should live of the gospel. . . Not abuse my power in the gospel. . . This I do for the gospel's sake. . . If our gospel be hid. . . They would pervert the gospel of Christ. . . Preparation of the gospel of peace. . . Your fellowship in the gospel. . . Confirmation of the gospel. . . Furtherance of the gospel. . . Defense of the gospel. . . The hope of the gospel. . . Partaker of the afflictions of the gospel. . . The bond of the gospel. . . Woe is me if I preach not the gospel."

And note also how affectionately and repeatedly he calls it "MY GOSPEL." Moreover, he thought it was the only Gospel: "Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

When we speak of Evangelism we stand on holy ground. Our Message is a survey of the wondrous Cross on which the Prince of Glory died, and which pours contempt on all our own pride. Our Motive is love, so amazing so divine that all human love seems icy cold in comparison. Our Dynamic for such an impossible task, for such an incomparable and glorious privilege, can only be the power of the Holy Spirit.

When the human heart has lost its contact with God, is void of a sense of sin; when darkness cover the face of the deep, then only God's voice can say, let there be light. Only God's power can produce a new creation. And this is evangelism.

Evangelism is resurrection. "Awake thou that sleepest, arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee life." Therefore, we ask,

I. What is our MESSAGE?

(1) It is personal not social. The Anglican divine, D. R. Davies, (whose recent book, "On to Orthodoxy" is a worthy successor to his terrific call for humiliation, "Down Peacock-feathers") writes: "I no longer believe in the Social Gospel. There is no such thing. It is a most calamitous misinterpretation of the New Testament Gospel. The Gospel is not a message to States, nations, groups, committees. It is a message to persons. You cannot convince nations of sin. Committees cannot repent." When Ninevah repents it is the individuals in Nineveh who do the repenting! Christ spoke to individuals not to masses. John 3:16. Whosoever means an individual." It is not the world that believes and has eternal life but only those who make self-conscious and deliberate choice. Mass evangelism is a contradiction of terms. Otherwise we must justify the absurd practice of some early Jesuits who baptised heathen with a squirt-gun. Christ died for all, but He calleth His own sheep by name. Simon, Simon; Martha, Martha; Saul, Saul.

The Gospel by its very nature works in one human heart at a time. It can work in Society only when many individuals in that Society are Christians in reality. The three thousand at Pentecost were each individually "pricked in their hearts;" individually confessed their sins and individually received forgiveness.

(2) Our message is central not peripheral. The whole Bible is the Word of God. But the Gospel is not the whole Bible. The Old Testament types and shadows and prophecies all point to Christ. But the central truths of the Good News are the historic facts regarding Our Saviour as recorded and interpreted by the Apostles who were eye-witnesses. We waste time and energy when we linger on the outskirts. We must begin at the center.

Paul spoke of the heart of his evangel as "the word of the Cross." By a five-fold repetition of the word evangel (Moffatt's version) he says in I Cor. 15:1-4: "Now, brothers, I would have you know the gospel I once preached to you, the gospel you received, the gospel in which you have your footing, the gospel by which you are saved—provided you adhere to my statement of it—unless indeed your faith was all haphazard. First and foremost, I passed on to you what I had myself received, namely, that Christ died for our sins as the scriptures had said, that he was buried, that he rose on the third day as the scriptures had said."

An Afghan Moslem friend, whom I met in London a few years ago, wrote a book entitled *Lights of Asia*. It describes five great religions, and one cannot put the heart of the Gospel message in better words than Ikbāl Ali Shah does in his chapter, "Christianity": "The Cross is the center of all revelation. Have you ever thought what the Bible would be like without the Cross? Take the Cross out of this book and you won't be able to recognize it. If there be no promise of the Cross in the Old Testament then its Laws distress me. It is a book of fatalism. If there is no Cross in the New Testament, then it blazes with pitiless splendour. But put the Cross back, and at once the book becomes a Gospel. Its Law becomes Love, its shadows flee away, its destiny is the Father's House.

"To reveal my sin merely would load me with despair; to forgive my sin merely would make me afraid of tomorrow. I want my sin conquered; I want to get it beneath my feet. The Cross is the place of victory. Christ did it upon the Cross. I say it reverently, He could not do it but for the Cross. It was expedient for one man to die for the people. He hath put away sin

—all sin—original sin and actual sin, by the sacrifice of Himself. 'There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin; He only could unlock the gate of Heaven and let us in.' Education could not do it. Social reform cannot do it. Our beautiful essays and ethical sermons cannot do it. It is Christ upon the Cross who discovers sin, who forgives sin, who conquers sin."

(3) **Fact not fiction. History not myth.** Adolph Harnack was a great scholar but his use of the word **myth** in regard to the Old, Old, Story has been the source of much confusion. Professor Nathaniel Micklem of Oxford, writing in *Theology Today* (April, 1948, p. 19), quotes "the profound saying of Harnack to the effect that the Christian Gospel is not one myth among many but Mythos, the myth come true." But he himself uses language even more objectionable: "The Gospel is a story, but is it history? Can it be history? History deals only with the actions and the thoughts of men. History cannot take cognizance of elves or centaurs. Scientific history cannot treat of the acts of God, still less of the coming into time of Almighty God. Besides, how can the changeless change, the timeless enter time? Stories of gods active upon earth, of which there are many, are called myths. The Christian Gospel in the nature of the case is mythological in form, for it deals with "the mighty acts of God," with the coming of the Son of God. The language of religious truth, then, for Christians is not only analogical, it is also mythological. There is grave objection to putting things in this way, for the dictionaries aver that a myth is in its essence a fictitious narrative. 'Mythological in form' however, does not necessarily imply 'fictitious in substance'."

This use of words is a danger signal to those who believe there is only one kind of history. Barth and the Existential school take refuge in a super-history theory to escape the miraculous. Is that a fair treatment of the Gospel record regarding the Virgin Birth or Christ's bodily resurrection? Can we expect supernatural results in preaching a non-supernatural Gospel?

(4) **It is a glorious message.** It concerns the Glory of the Manger—the Incarnation with its angel chorus

and effulgent star and wise men from the East. It concerns the Glory of the Cross towering o'er the wrecks of time, and all the wealth of sacred story still gathers round its head sublime. It concerns the Glory of the Empty Tomb and the Resurrection morning and the Master who showed us His hands and His side.

"No angel in the sky can fully bear that sight
But downward bends his burning eye at mys-
teries so bright."

What a glorious message is ours! And we are set apart to tell this good news, the Gospel of God's face. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!

It is a **hard message** to the Natural man, especially "the modern Man."

"The natural man, the modern man, whether he wears a brown shirt or a red shirt, is equally hostile to the challenge of the Gospel. I do not believe that the masses will ever be won for the Gospel as long as History lasts. There will be no traffic jams on the straight and narrow road that leadeth to life. Modern man, owing to his changed consciousness, is less open to the preaching of the Gospel than any of his predecessors. Five hundred years of Humanism, aided by a secularized Christianity, have superficialized his mind, thickened his soul, and intensified his pride of will. I do really believe that no amount of organized religion can bring him to repentance. He presents the Church of to-day with an insoluble problem. The sooner the Church recognizes that, the better it will be for modern man. In her realization of her impotence lies the hope of the Church; for through it God will endow the preaching of the Church with power."

How can I ever be ashamed of such a message? Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel. Yet how can an earthen vessel contain such treasure; how can mortal lips proclaim immortality; sinful lips forgiveness and human weakness proclaim Divine omnipotence? What motive can drive us and hold us to the task? What impulse is strong enough "to stir a fever in the blood of age, and make the infant's sinews strong as steel."

II. THE MOTIVE OF EVANGELISM

No human enterprise requires stronger motives than world wide evangelism. There is no task so vast, so difficult. For nineteen centuries it has staggered faith, tried love as by fire, and hope oftentimes disappointed has made hearts sick. When the road is long and up-hill all the way, we need a powerful engine to drive the car.

There have been unworthy motives since the days of the Apostles. The Pharisees crossed land and sea to make proselytes—their motive was zeal for Judaism. Paul speaks of those who preach the Gospel for envy and strife. Their sons still are alive today.

1. The ecclesiastical motive is due to pride and envy. Unless we occupy Jones' Corners the Methodists will get ahead of us! We are to be fishers of men but not to fish in other men's nets. It is not the function of a shepherd to be expert in stealing sheep.

2. Another worthy motive for evangelism is that based upon culture and social progress. "The flag follows missions" and "trade follows the flag." Such imperialism has often given its benediction and politics a motive to those who sought to serve Caesar by serving Christ. Politics and evangelism are poor bed-fellows whether in Arizona or Arabia. Christ's kingdom is not of this world. Evangelism is super-national in its outlook.

3. Success. Under the slogan "It pays" or "We can do it if we will" and the spell of statistics, the church in America was led astray in a by-path called The Inter-Church World Movement. But thoughtful pilgrims on the King's Highway, such as Henrick Kraemer and Robert E. Speer, led us back from crooked "Re-thinking Missions" to New Testament teaching on the message, the motive and the goal of Christian missions. (Today you may buy that greatly advertised volume for ten cents at a Second-hand book shop.)

4. Pity for the heathen was the great missionary motive in the eighteenth century. The travels of Captain Cook in the South Seas, the explorations of Livingstone in Africa, the lurid accounts of popular Hinduism were "Moving pictures" to that generation.

But the resulting conception of the non-Christian world was a caricature rather than a portrait. Not only in Ceylon "every prospect pleases and only man is vile" but on the Gold Coast of Chicago. The gods of wood and stone, even the symbols of phallic worship, are no more heinous to a Holy God than the paganism of Europe and America.

The motive of pity and compassion is valid and needful to move our emotions but it is not primary nor potent to move the intellect and the will.

Evangelism, in the words of Dr. Kraemer at Madras, must go back to the apostolic motives. "For all subsidiary arguments or motives, that have often usurped practically the place of the primary motive, are smitten to pieces under the hammer of the times. Recommending Christianity as the bringer of enlightenment and freedom, as a capital national and social tonic to make powerful nations, as the infallible guide to progress, has come to naught."

5. The two great motives of the early church were **the command of Christ and the Love of God**. That command did not rest primarily on the Great Commissions but on what Paul called "the Eternal purpose which God purposed in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:11.) As we have it in one of the great hymns:

"God from eternity hath willed
All flesh shall His salvation see;
So be the Father's love fulfilled,
The Saviour's sufferings crowned through Thee."

This eternal purpose of God for a lost world was declared by a fivefold repetition in the Great Commission. Matthew's closing paragraph, "All power is given unto me . . . Go ye therefore"—emphasizes Christ's **authority** in this commission. Mark its universality in scope and result. Luke outlines the permanent order of procedure—Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth, John states the **spiritual qualifications and demands**—"As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." When He showed them His hands and His side, He showed them also the greatness of His loving heart, His broken heart. Did He ever show you?

Paul's statement of his call gives a new and startling interpretation to all the others. The great Apostle

to the Gentiles received his commission direct from heaven. He "was appointed a minister and a witness, sent to open the eyes of the heathen, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God." Paul's own experience, in fact, interprets the great commission for us more deeply than any other scripture. Frederic W. H. Myers has put some of it into his matchless poem; He makes Paul exclaim:

Oft, when the word is on me to deliver,
Lifts the illusion and the truth lies bare;
Desert or throng, the city or the river,
Melts in a lucid Paradise of air—

Only like souls I see the folk thereunder,
Bound who should conquer, slaves who should be
kings—

Hearing their one hope with an empty wonder,
Sadly contented in a show of things;

Then with a rush the intolerable craving
Shivers throughout me like a trumpet-call—
Oh, to save these! to perish for their saving,
Die for their life, be offered for them all.

The Cross was not only the message of the apostles, but it was their motive, their aim and their goal. How very simply and terribly John puts it: "He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I John 3:16). And Peter thinks it a matter of course that the Christians scattered abroad, Jews and Gentiles, should endure fiery trial. "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed" (I Peter 4:12-16). Those who shared the suffering of Christ would be partakers of His glory. Finally we ask, "What is our Dynamic?"

III. OUR DYNAMIC

A recent book on Missions makes the astonishing statement that "it was at Matras the Christian Church for the first time really came to grips with the great social, racial, economic and political problems with which the world is confronted. The old day of the Prince Albert coat on the cannibal islands was done; the new day of the Christian engineer of human affairs was about to begin." (Roy L. Smith *The Revolution in Christian Missions* P. 198.)

The new missionary program advocated in this book is that of the Social Gospel. It is indeed a revolution of missions that is here proposed. But is it wise to discard the mainspring to repair a watch? What we need today is not more technique, more machinery, but more power. The more elaborate the organization of missions the more indispensable is the presence of the Spirit of God.

At times one feels, with a veteran missionary in India, that we are in dreadful peril of being dominated by the machinery we have created and sometimes the temptation arises to smash the machinery in order to save our souls! We spend more time at councils and committees than we do in prayer. We survey every department and every province and publish statistics, when what we most need is to "survey once more the wondrous Cross on which the Prince of Glory died."

The Apostolic Church began with a baptism of fire. What does fire do? Fire separates and fire unites; tears asunder and welds together. The fire of the Holy Spirit is diverse in its intolerance of evil, its sternness of rebuke, its judgment on sin. But the fire of the Holy Spirit also unites that which was sundered and broken and belongs together, like various metals the bell that gives harmony. Our sectarian divisions and ecclesiastical disputes are dissolved in the furnace of Christ's flaming love for sinners.

Only the fire of the Holy Spirit will purify the sons of Levi for the work of evangelism. His ministers will then be like a flame of fire. The Baptism of fire will confer such energy on pastor and people that we may write over every church: **PUBLIC SERVICE: LIGHT, HEAT, POWER.**

And God's fire spreads as well as energizes. So it was in the first century and so it can be now. A revival is like a prairie-fire, it sweeps all before it. A Revival of Evangelism can only come in answer to prayer. The Spirit fell on the early Church in direct answer to prayer (Acts 1:24; 4:24, 31). Our Anglican brethren are striving with sincerity to bring together the branches of the Church on the basis of the Lambeth Quadrilateral. But the apostolic quadrilateral is broader and more basic for the reunion of all Christendom

(Acts 2:42). We read that they "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and the breaking of bread and in prayers." Would that today all missionaries and pastors were continuing steadfastly in Paul's doctrine, Paul's fellowship of love (I Cor. 13), Paul's interpretation of the sacraments, and Paul's power of intercessory prayer. The most important one of this quadrilateral is love for the brethren. We must have apostolic fellowship before we can expect an Apostolic Pentecost. The sticks must be laid close together to build a fire. Separation and Schism never produced a Revival.

Again since the beginning of Evangelism, prayer has been the secret power and perseverance and victory. All the great missionaries were, first of all, great in their prayer-life. Paul's prayers teach us what intercessory prayer can be and should be. Compact sentences, weighty in thought and deep with emotion, comprehensive in spiritual insight, wrestling against the powers of darkness—such are the prayers of the dauntless apostle. And the result was victory. It was Paul's prayer-life that produced the kind of Christians we read of in the New Testament, abounding in every good word and work. If you desire to learn the secret of communion with Christ and of power for service, read Paul's epistles. Study his prayers and confessions of sin. In such case, to go back to Paul is to go back to Pentecost—and the only dynamic of missions. Paul's epistles are not dry-as-dust-dogma—they are pages torn from his diary wet with tears and blood!

Therefore, in a day like ours, we dare not build our hopes on governments or treaties, or maps of a new world-order. Prayer and the power of the Spirit—these are the hope of missions at home and in every land. The energies of the universe, nay of God Himself, are at the disposal of those who pray. "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16:20). So it was in the beginning, is now and evermore shall be until the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ—at His glorious appearing! Maranatha, even so come Lord Jesus.